# Introduction

There is a clear legal framework for co-operation between children’s services and housing services to meet the needs of children and young people. This protocol sets out practical arrangements for providing services that prevent young people and families from becoming homeless.

The joint protocol sets out the process to ensure effective action to prevent youth homelessness and the provision of sufficient accommodation to meet the range of needs of homeless young people.

The protocol is supported by the city’s Homelessness Strategy which aims to ‘improve the lives of people facing, or experiencing homelessness’ and the Children and Young People’s Plan which aims to ‘improve children’s lives by working in partnership to raise aspirations and build achievement’.

# Strategic joint working

Children’s services work with housing services, registered social landlords, housing related support services and with other partners to secure a range of suitable housing and support options for young people and their families. This includes options for the provision of accommodation with support for 16 or 17 year olds who seek help because they are homeless, and for care leavers.

Children’s services are members of the Leicester Homelessness Partnership and the Housing Division are represented on the Children’s Trust Board.

# Aims and objectives

To enable joint working to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people are achieved. This includes making sure young people who are at risk of becoming homeless or become homeless receive timely and appropriate support and services.

This protocol has been developed to:

* + Prevent homelessness
	+ Make sure people get the housing-related and other support they need without being passed between services unnecessarily
	+ Ensure access to suitable accommodation when homelessness cannot be prevented

# Guiding principles

* + Emergency accommodation will be provided only if arrangements between family and friends cannot be made or are deemed inappropriate
	+ Housing Options and Duty and Advice Service will collaborate to ensure that there is one single joint assessment for homeless 16/17 year olds.
	+ Young people’s welfare is paramount and any safeguarding issues or concerns will be considered by DAS as part of the assessment.
	+ Arrangements will state clearly who is providing the accommodation
	+ Bed and Breakfast accommodation is not suitable for 16 and 17 year old’s
	+ A young person in crisis should receive a practical and immediate response from whichever agency they first approach.
	+ All agencies will be open and honest with the young person and their families about the service they can offer, and other agencies’ roles and responsibilities based on a joint shared assessment.
	+ The availability or otherwise of suitable accommodation or support must not influence the determination of statutory duties under the Children Act 1989
	+ All homeless families and pregnant women will be offered help to find and keep a settled home

# Scope

1. Arrangements to prevent youth homelessness and provide support to young people to remain living with their families where appropriate.
2. Arrangements for joint / integrated assessment for 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
3. Arrangements for assessing housing needs of care leavers aged 18-21.
4. Arrangements for providing support to children of families living in temporary accommodation.
5. Arrangements for children of families who have been, or are at the risk of being, found intentionally homeless by a housing authority.
6. Arrangements for access to housing related support services.
7. Arrangements for timely assessment and placement provision for young people who require accommodation on release from custody.

# Dispute resolution and concerns

If the issue cannot be resolved by frontline officers the matter should be referred jointly to the respective service managers in Housing Options and DAS for resolution. All dispute resolution and resulting decisions will be taken in the spirit of this protocol recognising the need for effective joint working ensuring young people are appropriately safeguarded.

# Evaluation and monitoring of the protocol

The protocol will be monitored by HOS, Housing and Children, Young People and Families and they will seek feedback from both front line staff and management. This will inform an annual review of the protocol. Any revisions to the protocol will be agreed by the signatories below.

# Signatories

We (on behalf of our service areas) sign up to the principles set out in this Protocol and commit to its aims and objectives:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| Ann Branson, Director Housing, Leicester City Council | Date |
|  |  |
| Clair Pyper, Interim Director Children’s Social Care &Safeguarding, Leicester City Council | Date |

# Arrangements to prevent youth homelessness and provide support to young people to remain living with their families

**Young people**

1. The starting point should be that all children and young people are best living with their families, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. Every effort should be made therefore to mediate between young people and their families to negotiate a return home.
2. Housing Options will complete an initial interview with the young person and will usually contact parents /carers to ascertain their views and the support needed to secure a return home. Where the young person is able to return home, Housing Options will support this, including completing an Early Help Assessment to initiate a support plan to meet the young person’s needs.
3. Where young people are unable or unwilling to return to their immediate families, young people should be supported to explore living with other family members and community options where their needs can be met. Consideration should be given to the completion of an Early Help Assessment to support the return home of a young person or to develop a support package with wider family members / friends.
4. Where a young person cannot or is unwilling to return home and there are no other identifiable options, the record of the initial interview and initial decision will clearly state the reasons for this and the work that has been undertaken to attempt reconciliation. In these cases Housing Options will discuss with the young person and with the Duty and Advice Service (DAS) to determine whether a referral to DAS is required based on the young person’s safeguarding needs. This will be supported by a summary of the initial interview / initial decision.
5. Following receipt of a referral, DAS will complete a further screening assessment to determine whether a duty is owed under Section 20(CA) and whether Section 17 criteria are met. DAS staff will continue to explore the possibility of the young person returning to their family, or to friends, and where this is an option, will positively support this. Where Section 17 criteria are met further assessment will be undertaken by Children in Need (CIN) staff, to develop a support plan to address the young person’s assessed needs.

# Families

1. All homeless families and pregnant women will be offered help to find and keep a settled home. If a family fear they are facing homelessness for whatever reason and they contact Housing Options or a local Housing Office they will be offered support and advice to either keep their existing home (e.g. debt and welfare advice, Housing Benefits check, negotiating with their current landlord) or offered assistance to find a new house (e.g. join the housing register, look in private rented sector with the help of Leicester Let or a rent deposit guarantee).

# Arrangements for joint / integrated assessment for 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

**Introduction**

The procedures for assessment, decision making and housing / assistance of homeless 16-17 year olds fall in to 6 sections:

Stage 1 - Initial contact

Stage 2 - Initial interview and investigation

Stage 3 - Provision of temporary accommodation Stage 4 - Further investigation

Stage 5 - Joint assessment

Stage 6 - Housing and support package

Where a 16-17 year old who is a parent presents as homeless, this protocol will be followed in relation to the young person. Whilst the needs of the young person’s child will need to be taken into account as part of the assessment and planning process, it is the legal duty that is owed to the young person that is key to the provision of accommodation. Although the young person may become a Look After Child, this would not be the case for their child unless there are other presenting issues. Any child protection concerns should be referred to Children’s Service Duty & Advice Team.

# Stage 1: Initial Contact

1. A young person can contact

Leicester City Council Housing Options Service (HOS) Or 16 Plus Service (If they are already LAC)

Or a voluntary housing / advice agency

If a young person contacts any voluntary organisations he / she should be referred by that organisation to either Housing Options Service (HOS) or 16 Plus Service

1. If it is clear that a young person has made contact with both agencies, the first agency contacted or involved should initiate action and should not redirect the young person to the other agency without a formal referral.
2. The officer who has initial contact with the young person will complete a standard monitoring form. All forms will be collated by who will produce statistics each month for joint monitoring purposes.

# Stage 2: Initial Interview

The agency with which the young person has initial contact will coordinate the case from initial interview to the drawing up of the action plan.

# Leicester City Council

* 1. HOS will conduct an initial interview to determine whether there is a duty under Part VII of Housing Act 1996 (amended HA 2002)
	2. In order to aid the Options Officers from HOS can liaise 16 Plus Service
		+ about current or previous CYP & F involvement with the young person
		+ to seek advice if they have concerns about the young person’s safeguarding and wellbeing e.g. abuse, mental health problems etc.
		+ to seek advice about the vulnerability decision

# Children, Young people and Families

1. DAS will carry out a Single Assessment under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to determine whether the young person is ‘in need’.
2. Assessments may be done by 16 Plus Service or DAS, depending upon the office base visited by the young person. In all cases will be consulted and lead on decisions regarding young people’s LA accommodation.
3. If it is the view of 16 Plus Service that the young person is not ‘in need’, appropriate advice is given including referral to HOS.

# Stage 3: Provision of Temporary Accommodation

1. **Leicester City Council**

If a duty exists or may under Part VII HOS will place the young person in temporary accommodation

# Children, young people and families ( CYPF)

If the young person is deemed ‘a child in need’, 16 Plus Service will negotiate temporary accommodation.

1. In certain cases there will be a need for interagency discussion at this stage.

This will involve HOS and 16Plus Sevice.

Discussion will take place where:

* 1. There are particular housing and support needs which the agency dealing with the case cannot provide from its own resources or networks.
	2. There is no appropriate accommodation available from the resources or networks of the agency dealing with the case.
	3. A young person being assessed by HOS has no access to financial support or income from employment, training, benefits or family.
1. The interagency discussion will determine:
	1. Which is the most appropriate temporary accommodation available
	2. The support needed.
	3. Whether financial support is available from Children services

# Stage 4: Further Investigation

1. The agency dealing with the case will carry out further investigation to determine whether it has a duty under its respective legislation.

# If no duty exists under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 16 Plus Service (or relevant Team in consultation with 16 Plus Service) will give appropriate advice, including referral to HOS using appropriate referral form.

# Stage 5: Joint Assessment

1. If a duty exists under Part VII 96 1985 or the young person is ‘in need’ under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 it may be appropriate for a joint assessment at this stage.

It is not intended that joint assessments take place in all cases.

Joint discussions / meetings will be covered by HOS / 16 Plus Service only in cases where:

* 1. DAS feel that independent accommodation is the appropriate housing option and they wish to make a referral under Section 27 of the Children Act 1989

**or** b. HOS deem the young person to be in priority need but intentionally homeless.

**or** c. HOS feel that the young person needs additional support when housed.

# Stage 6: Housing and Support Plan

1. If the case does not fit the criteria for a joint assessment meeting the lead agency dealing with the case will negotiate accommodation as appropriate.
2. If a joint assessment meeting takes place participants of the meeting will draw up an agreed Housing and Support package.
3. 16 Plus Service will negotiate with the relevant Divisional Management about the provision of a rent guarantee in cases where the Department has requested accommodation under Section 27 of the Children Act 1989.

**Joint Protocol Working with Homeless 16 – 17 Year Olds**

Young person contacts DAS (16 Plus Service or relevant Team)

Young person contacts Vol. Agency Shelter, HA etc.

Young person contacts HOS

 **STAGE 1**

Initial Contact

Agency contacts SC&H or Housing Dept

DAS (16 Plus Service or relevant Team) Initial interview

HOS Initial Interview

**STAGE 2**

Initial Interview and Assessment

HSO contacts 16 Plus Service for Information

Is there a duty under Section 17 No CA 1989?

Advice given to young person

e.g. HOS No

Duty under Part VII HA 96

Yes

Yes

16 Plus Service arrange Temporary accommodation

In Specific cases, case discussion 16 Plus Service / HOS regarding accommodation, resources and provision of financial support by CYF & F

HOS arrange temporary accommodation

**STAGE 3**

Temporary Accommodation

Further investigation under S 17/20 CA 89 by 16 Plus Service

Is there a duty?

Further investigation under Part VII by HOS

Is there a duty?

**STAGE 4**

Further Investigation

No Yes

Yes

**STAGE 5**

Joint Assessment

Advice

Meets criteria for joint assessment?

Yes

Joint assessment panel HOS & 16 Plus Service

Yes

Meets criteria for joint assessment?

**STAGE 5**

**STAGE 6**

**Housing & Support Plan**

Joint Assessment

Housing & Support

No package

Consider Early Help

No**STAGE 6**Housing & Support

Consider Early Help

# Arrangements for assessing housing needs of care leavers

1. In the case of young people who are already in care including 16 -17 year olds subject to section 20 for more than 20 days, and/or eligible young people\* and the LA are proposing that their care plan should be to move from a regulated placement to an unregulated placement (not inspected by Ofsted ) which requires housing services accommodation/support, the PA with others should undertake an assessment of the young person’s skills and abilities and the care plan should then be considered at an independently chaired pathway review meeting which the IRO will chair.
2. These arrangements will be in accordance with relevant statutory guidance including the Care Planning Placement and Case Review regulations (revised June 2015).
3. The PA will forward an assessment to Housing Options for registration marked “Leaving Care”. Need points awarded at this point are only dependent on the current housing circumstances. The application will remain suspended pending further investigation. The PA will arrange an appointment with Housing Options for the young person, arranging including an interpreter as necessary. An appointment will be made within 10 working days however if the young person is currently homeless an emergency appointment will be arranged.
4. A housing advice interview will take place including discussion on housing options. The young person will be advised that properties available maybe undecorated and unfurnished and will be advised of available grants / benefits and organisations that may be able to assist. The PA will, if necessary, help the young person complete any applications and support the young person to use the choice based letting system and make suitable bids as required. The 16/17 year old housing assessment will be reviewed and the outcome discussed with the young person and the PA. The young person will be advised that if they require temporary accommodation Leicester City Council has a statutory duty to provide this if necessary. Should they find themselves homeless they should come into Housing Options and an initial assessment for services will be completed and if available temporary accommodation will be provided. However as there can be times where no bed spaces are available in temporary accommodation Young persons are encouraged wherever possible to remain in their current accommodation until permanent rehousing is found.
5. If housing support services are immediately required an initial assessment for homelessness preventative services should be completed and the recommendations

/ outcomes should be discussed with the Young person and the PA.

1. Housing Options will award statutory homeless banding and the system will be updated to ensure offers go via a named officer and should there be any refusals the named officer is also notified. The Young person and the PA is provided with the name and contact details of their nominated officer who can be contacted if there are any issues.
2. All Young persons will be subject to the normal offer policy (one suitable offer with homeless priority and one further without).

# Provision of support to homeless families

Family Support Service and Corner Club

Support plans are tailored to each member of the family. Support is available to those families identified as being particularly at risk of homelessness. Workers are specialists in child development, child protection and work with the survivors of domestic abuse. Resettlement work takes places in the community alongside STAR to ensure a smooth transition into settled accommodation. The service has a multi-skilled team who are qualified to a high standard in child development and safeguarding. Team also works with sex workers and offer sexual health advice, pregnancy tests and contraception.

Corner Club provides sessional crèches and a homework club for children staying in Border House and also parent and children sessions for those staying in Border House and the local community.

# Arrangements for children of families who have been, or are at the risk of being, found intentionally homeless by a housing authority

Leicester City Council aims to reduce the likelihood of parents becoming intentionally homeless. For council tenants there are support services in place to reduce evictions for rent arrears and anti-social behaviour including joint working at pre- eviction stages. If eviction cannot be avoided Housing Services will notify Children’s Services where there are known to be children affected.

1. Where appropriate there will be involvement of CYPF teams in the homelessness investigation or through other joint case working prior to the homelessness declaration being made.
2. When Housing Options make an intentionally homeless decision (involving children) they will inform Children’s DAS at the same time the decision letter is issued. This notification does not form part of the Homelessness decision making process.

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| Children’s Services will arrange to carry out an initial assessment within 7 working |  |
| days of the decision letter being received primarily to decide whether the child is in |
| need. |  |

1. Children’s Services may call a case meeting to which Housing Options will send a Housing Options Officer. The Options Officer can assist the family in considering and / or accessing other housing options and will be able to advise on the statutory review process on homelessness decisions.
2. Families will be given information of their right to request a review of the homelessness decision. Officers can direct them to external agencies for independent advice / advocacy in making their appeal.

If following an initial assessment the child is found not to be in need, the family and Housing Options should be informed in writing within 3 days (including reasons for the decision). If the assessment determines the child is in need but there are no needs beyond the lack of housing Children’s Services will consider the following options (and will fund any costs): accommodation with extended family, accommodation elsewhere in the UK or abroad or providing a rent deposit.

|  |
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| Should the family obtain accommodation and require on-going housing related |
| support to resettle and prevent future homelessness Children’s Services should |
| complete an initial assessment form and return this to Housing Options within 3 days |
| of their decision. |

# Arrangements for access housing related support services Families & Pregnant Women

1. The council will arrange alternative accommodation. Only if homeless cannot be prevented or it is unreasonable for the household to stay where they are (e.g. fleeing domestic violence) Children’s Services should refer all cases to Housing Options for assessment Housing options will then work with the family to secure a settled home.
2. The Council believes that with very few exceptions it is better for a family to be offered a settled family home (including the private rented sector) rather than a hostel space. A rent deposit guarantee scheme is available to help families access the private rented sector. Families on the Housing Register (e.g. those in insecure accommodation, overcrowded families, families living in one-bedroom accommodation, families with medium level health or care needs and families living with friends and relatives) will be placed in band 2 to help them secure settled accommodation through Leicester Let.
3. If no settled home is immediately available and the family is in crisis then temporary accommodation would be considered. If temporary accommodation is available the Single Access and Referral service will refer the family to this accommodation.

The council’s eligibility criteria for emergency or temporary accommodation will be used. The main eligibility categories relating to families and pregnant women are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Duty arises from** |
| a) Families and pregnant woman | Housing Act 1996 |
| f) Vulnerable adults and families | National Assistance Act 1948Referrals from Adults Social Care Division |

1. If no settled accommodation or temporary accommodation was available then Housing Options will provide bed and breakfast accommodation. Bed and breakfast accommodation will only be used as a last resort in an emergency for the shortest period of time possible and is not deemed suitable for 16/17 year olds.
2. Housing related support will be provided by temporary accommodation providers and where appropriate support may also be provided by floating support providers in settled accommodation. If Children’s services have particular concerns or housing officers are identify vulnerable families that might be at risk of losing their home then Family Support services will be considered in appropriate circumstances.

Children’s services will advise housing on the need and priority. The support offered will form part of any safeguarding plans put in place by children’s services.

Accommodation will be provided only in cases where it is unreasonable for the young person to remain living their existing accommodation or with other family members. For some young people it is reasonable to offer a period of time in temporary accommodation whilst they are given assistance to find their own more permanent accommodation or to return to live with family and friends.

If the person is eligible and has a requirement for temporary accommodation the Single Access and Referral service will refer the young person to this accommodation.

The council’s eligibility criteria for emergency or temporary accommodation will be used.The main eligibility categories relating to children and young people are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Duty arises from** |
| c) Children leaving care | Children’s Act 1989Referrals from Children’s Division and Housing Act 1986 |

The Council has commissioned specialist accommodation for young people aged 16- 25.

1. For young people aged 18 or over (excluding care leavers and vulnerable young people) temporary accommodation will only be offered where there is a bed-space available.
2. Housing related support will be provided by temporary accommodation providers and where appropriate support may also be provided by floating support providers in settled accommodation

# Out of hours / emergency referrals

Where young people present as homeless outside of office hours, the priority must be the safety and well-being of the young person, and where needed accommodation which will be provided until the next working day. Children’s Services will be responsible for the funding of this accommodation which will be agreed through the DAS. The young person will then be referred to Housing Options the next working day for an initial interview.

# Arrangements for timely assessment and placement provision for young people who require accommodation on release from custody

Where a young person is in Youth Court and is ordered not to return home, there is a risk that the young person could be remanded to custody if they do not have an address. In these circumstances, the Youth Offending Service will take responsibility for exploring other accommodation options with the young person, including family and friends. If no other options can be identified the Youth Offending Service will refer directly to Children’s Services for an assessment.

Where a young person is currently in custody and will be or is likely to be homeless on release, the Youth Offending Service should refer the young person directly to the DAS at least 4 weeks prior to release date for an assessment to be undertaken.

Where a young person is sentenced to custody whilst Section 20 it should be noted that a Looking after Child Review should be convened prior to release date to plan for accommodation and support services.